



**WisDOT/Wisconsin Walks Stakeholder Meeting  
November 5, 2004**

People in attendance

Nancy Chudy – Wisconsin DHFS/DPH  
Kit Keller – Wisconsin Walks  
Ann Clark – Wisconsin Walks  
Angie Tornes – Wisconsin Walks, National Park Service  
Deborah Pasha – Wisconsin Walks, DHFS/DPH SERO  
Katharine Odell – Vilas Neighborhood Assn.  
John Bauer – AARP/Active for Life  
Jim Stickels – Wisconsin Walks  
Cheryl Wittke – Safe Community Coalition  
Larisa DeZayas – Wisconsin Walks  
Michael O'Meara – Wisconsin Walks, WisDOT, STDT  
Lois Kawatski – WisDOT D2  
Larry Corsi – WisDOT BOTS  
Casey Newman – WisDOT  
Doug Dalton – WisDOT  
Tom Huber – WisDOT  
John Swissler – WisDOT

1. Overview of WisDOT's meeting purpose and WisDOT's long-range plan by WisDOT staff:  
WisDOT staff provided an overview of Connections 2030 and its process and reviewed the public survey recently conducted. Plan alternatives should be available for public comment in July of 2005. The plan is scheduled to be completed in 2006.
2. Gathering of input from the members of Wisconsin Walks: Discussion focused on the following issues:
  - a. Survey  
Members of Wisconsin Walks said they were pleased to see the need for alternatives and pedestrian needs valued so highly in the public survey. They asked how many priorities from the survey likely would be addressed? WisDOT responded, at this point, the agency can't be sure but that safety overall will definitely play a big role.
  - b. Corridors  
Members of Wisconsin Walks asked how pedestrian/bike issues will be addressed as part of the corridor scheme. WisDOT explained the corridor idea is a way to visualize the impacts of adopted and proposed policies. Also, WisDOT recognizes the need to address needs in corridor; for example, pedestrian access across large busy highways.

c. Wisconsin Walks Overview

Wisconsin Walks provided an overview of their work and goals; they identified four goals they have for future development of the transportation system: 1) health; 2) safety; 3) quality of life, and 4) civic engagement. The members discussed the problem of childhood obesity and said part of the cause is the difficulty kids have walking and biking to school. They noted that addressing this problem could help reduce medical care costs for all society.

Wisconsin Walks members talked about the need to provide a better local street network to direct local traffic, bikes, and pedestrians off congested highways. They said the issue of barriers created by highways needs to be examined.

d. Pedestrian and Bike Plans

The members of Wisconsin Walks asked about role of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plans in Connections 2030. WisDOT said that they will be incorporated into Connections and, where needed, updated. WisDOT also noted that they will be working on the Pedestrian Best Practices Resource Guide and that Connections 2030 will highlight this.

Middle schools and high schools require, respectively, 60 and 100 acres of land for physical education and other activities; this is what causes schools to be built out on the urban fringe; it is difficult to find acreage within developed areas. School siting is a policy issue that needs a comprehensive review because of the attendant auto and bus transportation/traffic issues created by the current policy.

e. Quality of Life

Wisconsin Walks discussed what the group means by “Quality Life” in the transportation system; they praised WisDOT’s Community Sensitive Design work – Wisconsin Walks wants transportation facilities that welcome people to a place. Regarding “Community Engagement,” they noted that the presence and number of pedestrians can be an indicator of a community’s health, well-being, and connectedness.

f. Wisconsin Walks Recommendations for Plan Policies

Wisconsin Walks identified certain policies they feel the plan should consider:

- The plan should note that providing pedestrian facilities can delay the need for urban highway expansion. If shoppers can park in one spot and walk from store to store they will reduce their impact on local traffic thereby reducing the need for widening.
- Bussing is a big drain on school districts’ budgets. If hazardous areas exist (such as unsafe crossings or lack of sidewalks) the district must bus the students. Developers are building without providing sidewalks; this imposes a cost later on for taxpayers when the kids in those new developments must be bussed.
- The full extent of pedestrian injuries is not known. They are counted only if they happen on the roadways. If it is on the sidewalk only, it is not tracked

on anything akin to the MV4000. If someone trips over a displacement between two sidewalk slabs or slips on ice they are injured but it is not tracked from a transportation perspective.

- When highways are expanded, ROW necessary to ensure later ability to build pedestrian facilities should be preserved.
- Highway expansion often occurs at the expense of pedestrian facilities; highways must be expanded when warranted but, when they must be widened, the pedestrian facilities are often “swallowed up” and not replaced. Wisconsin Walks wants WisDOT to replace pedestrian facilities in every instance that they are encroached upon unless it’s physically impossible.
- Need education of both motorists and pedestrians about safety -- they need to watch out for each other. WisDOT should allocate money for education efforts. Right turn on red is a particular danger to pedestrians, especially pedestrians with disabilities.
- Other things to consider include: post lower speeds on neighborhood streets, emphasize more signal synchronization, expand flag program statewide.
- There is a need for clarification of who has responsibility for certain spots. Is it the state? county? city? It is often unclear who has the power to push for providing pedestrian facilities at different spots. Who has the teeth to insist on them?
- There is a need to conduct far more education of the public and others that higher speeds don’t necessarily increase roadway capacity. For example, expressways reach the point of capacity diminishment at 30 mph because vehicles need more and more space as speeds increase.
- Roadway designers will do whatever they’re told to do; they are very good at taking instructions and designing it to reality. Earlier, we never worried about contaminated soil but now we do; we used to direct highway alignments TOWARD wetlands, now we don’t. If we tell them that optimizing pedestrian access and mobility is important – they’ll do that; but we’re not sure what that always means; can’t just build pedestrian overpasses; need to look at conditions and behaviors. Wisconsin Walks urges policies that make the entire transportation system a pleasure for all modes to use.

The Wisconsin Walks position paper on Transportation Policy is attached.

## **WISCONSIN WALKS' POSITION PAPER ON TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

### **1. Recognize Walking as a Basic Transportation Mode.**

Walking is fundamental to humans and a key component of basic health. Walking is also a critical element of our urban transportation systems. It is the beginning and ending of all trips and it is essential to transit trips. The presence of walkers is an indicator of a community's quality of life, and their absence indicates a declining quality of life.

Walking has declined in this country as transportation and land use has become more and more dominated by motor vehicles. Facilities designed primarily for automobiles and trucks have degraded access for pedestrians. Walking has become the most unsafe form of transportation.

To remedy this situation, we recommend that Wisconsin transportation policy:

- Set a goal of ensuring that every Wisconsin resident and visitor is able to walk safely to meet their essential daily needs and that every child living within walking distance is able to safely walk to school.
- Adopt and set a goal to exceed the goals of the Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan and the National Bicycling and Walking Study to double the percentage of trips made by foot and bicycle and to simultaneously reduce the number of crashes involving the two modes by ten percent.

### **2. Support Walking as a Key Component of Public Health**

Walking is a key component of basic health. The absence of walking is associated with the increase of many diseases including asthma, obesity, heart disease, and many others. The design of our transportation system has not considered the impact of its design on public health.

While the improvement of air quality has been a high priority of previous transportation authorization bills, the effect of transportation projects on overall public health has not been included in criteria for project selection. Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects not only reduce air pollution (from vehicle trips shifted to biking and walking) but also improve community health by providing an environment that supports physical activity.

We propose that Wisconsin transportation policy:

- Assess the impact of new roads and roadway "improvements" funded with federal or state transportation monies on the walking environment and thus on the health of the inhabitants of the community to which the improvements are directed.
- Require that funding decisions also be based on the cost-effectiveness of improvements to community health.

### **3. Plan for Walking**

Walking is, too often, an afterthought in transportation planning in Wisconsin. Frequently, facilities for pedestrians – if even included in plans – are grouped together with bicycle facilities. The result is that one or the other mode usually takes precedence in plans and project designs. Further, transportation models often neglect to include walking.

To remedy this situation, we recommend that Wisconsin transportation policy:

- Require that every transportation project, both highway and transit, improve access, convenience and safety for those choosing to travel by foot or by bicycle.
- Require that all RPCs and MPOs prepare, adopt and implement pedestrian action plans including an assessment of pedestrian safety, accessibility and connectivity in their jurisdictions and the cost to remediate pedestrian safety, accessibility and connectivity in their jurisdiction.
- Initiate a statewide data collection on walking trips and the portion of trips that is by walking including data on walk-to-school trips and walk-to-transit trips.
- Initiate a statewide training program to train existing and future transportation professionals to integrate walking and bicycling into transportation planning and project design. *(We applaud WisDOT for the Pedestrian Facility Design and Bicycle Facility Design courses that WisDOT Ped/Bike Coordinator Tom Huber started in recent months. Keep doing this!)*

#### **4. Support Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S)**

The number of children walking and biking to school in Wisconsin has significantly declined over the past three decades, with multiple damaging consequences. The public health community is seriously alarmed at the extent of physical inactivity, particularly in children, and the future cost in lives. At the same time, in many places the "school commute" by auto has become a significant factor in peak hour congestion. In too many communities, parents experience safety concerns and other barriers that make them wary of allowing their children to walk or bicycle to school. We note that eight states have recently passed some form of state legislation on SR2S. Wisconsin Walks supports both Wisconsin state SR2S legislation AND national SR2S legislation.

We propose that Wisconsin transportation policy:

- Make it a priority to remove barriers and encourage Wisconsin's children to walk and bicycle to school.
- Require that metropolitan transportation plans address the transportation needs related to school children including the traffic impacts of commute to school trips and include school officials in the transportation planning process.

#### **5. Support Safe Routes to Transit**

In many places in our communities, it is difficult, dangerous, and sometimes impossible to get to or from transit stops on foot. There is a particular need for pedestrian facilities to connect transit stops to employment centers. The lack of pedestrian facilities reduces use of the transit system and increases costs for parking and road improvements. The result is that communities do not get full benefit from the investment that they are making to improve transit service.

We urge Wisconsin transportation policy to:

- Require that transit properties address pedestrian accessibility in their capital improvement plans.
- Include funding to improve pedestrian access to transit.

#### **6. Reconnect Communities**

Interstate Highways and high speed urban arterials with few or dangerous pedestrian crossings have created barriers through communities. State highways run through cities, villages and towns; traffic volumes and speeds can divide even the smallest community. The resulting community fragmentation damages livability and increases the overall cost of providing other services. These

sections of highways should be continuously evaluated for the safety and convenience of pedestrians.

We recommend that Wisconsin transportation policy:

- Require that planning for pedestrian and bicycle crossings be required when building or expanding freeway interchanges.
- Require that urban arterials include frequent, safe, and well designed crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Require that accessible pedestrian signals be installed whenever state or federal transportation funds are used to make intersection signal improvements.
- Help communities correct the damage to their community caused by this fragmentation by allocating funds for this purpose.
- Continuously evaluate state highways for pedestrian safety and convenience.

### **7. Implement the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the Public Right-of-Way**

A dozen years after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act the public right-of-way in Wisconsin remains inaccessible in far too many places. These deficiencies put our most vulnerable citizens at the greatest risk, depriving them of independence. We urge Wisconsin to make key policy changes. We also support a dedicated program at the national level to address these serious deficiencies.

Wisconsin transportation policy needs to:

- Require that all transportation improvements include appropriate accommodations, such as sidewalks, for persons with disabilities.

Wisconsin Walks joins America Walks in proposing that U.S. transportation policy:

- Adopt a National Mobility Goal for Equal Access and require transportation programs to provide expeditious progress towards attainment of this goal, supported by quantitative analysis and evaluation of access and mobility.
- Reduce or eliminate local match requirements for projects that implement ADA in the public right-of-way.

### **8. Slow Down Urban Roadways**

Speed kills. Speeding drivers kill pedestrians. In our obsession to reduce congestion, we have inadvertently created a transportation system that promotes excess speed due to the "excess capacity" during non-congested periods. Excess capacity on our arterials and "parkways" has accidentally encouraged drivers to speed 10-20 miles over posted speeds, thereby creating several generations of lawless drivers. We do not have enough law enforcement personnel to solve this dangerous problem! The potential for drivers to inflict death and injury on people who are walking increases significantly as the speed of the vehicle increases.

We believe SAFETY should be the FIRST policy PRIORITY for Wisconsin roadways. Therefore, we strongly believe Wisconsin and U.S. transportation policy must:

- Require that speed limits and speed management on any facility funded in whole or in part with federal or state transportation dollars should be established and enforced as life-preserving first and traffic-moving last.

- Require that transportation plans include measures to reduce and manage speed on arterial and collector roadways.
- Provide incentives for communities to reduce excess capacity by eliminating travel lanes and narrowing roadways.
- Require the abandonment of arcane formulas for setting speed limits based on the speed of the traffic such as the 85th percentile rule.

## 9. Make Wisconsin More Walkable

The public right of way has become increasingly hostile, dangerous, and unhealthy for pedestrians (AND for drivers, bicyclists, transit riders, and all people with disabilities).

To improve that condition, Wisconsin needs to improve our policies, programs and projects. Wisconsin would be more walkable if:

- WisDOT and DHFS collaborated to develop a message to promote walking AND to motivate people in our state to make Wisconsin more walkable by driving safely. **A unified, statewide, ongoing message is long overdue.**
- Wisconsin's state legislators required motorists to stop for pedestrians waiting to cross the street at marked and unmarked crosswalks.
- The Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020 was implemented.
- Governor Doyle made it a policy priority to reduce statewide and local costs related to traffic crashes, traffic congestion and physical inactivity.<sup>1</sup>

NOTE: This position paper is adapted from America Walks' policy paper on Reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act For The 21st Century.

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"Transportation and community planning are public health issues."

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<sup>1</sup> One strategy is to include in the next budget significant funding for a meaningful, statewide Transportation Demand Management program that truly promotes alternatives to driving through social marketing principles. Currently, Wisconsin does not actively promote walking, bicycling, transit, and carpooling. Wisconsin Walks recommends that future TDM programs require WisDOT and DHFS to work collaboratively with local governments, businesses and individuals to reduce car and truck traffic.